

Vegetable Report

ACREAGE-WINTER QUARTER (Jan. Feb, Mar.)

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WEATHER: Storms during the first days of **October**, remnants of Hurricane Rita, delayed some planting in the central and southern Peninsula. In the Hastings area, drier conditions allowed cabbage planting to continue on schedule. Okra cutting continued throughout the month in Dade County. Pickle harvesting got underway in the central and southern Peninsula. Tomato harvesting was active all month around the Quincy area. Drier conditions in some central and southern Peninsula areas allowed planting and harvesting to stay mostly on schedule. However, saturated soils in Miami-Dade County delayed some planting. Snap bean, squash and sweet corn picking got underway by mid-month with very light amounts available. In St. Johns County, rains from Tropical Storm Tammy and sea breeze clashes accounted for an abundance of rain throughout the area, which suspended cabbage planting until fields dried out a little. The dry weather that followed, coupled with plenty of sunshine allowed planting to progress on schedule in most areas. By mid-October, saturated fields from continuous rains in parts of Dade County delayed fall planting by two weeks. Strawberry transplanting remained active in the Plant City area. The last week in October ended with a pause in most planting and harvesting over the Peninsula due to Hurricane Wilma, which damaged several vegetable fields across the southern Peninsula as the storm made landfall.

Harvesting was curtailed in many areas across the central and southern Peninsula due to storm damage or saturated fields. A lack of labor hindered the salvaging of transplants, which delayed scheduled planting in some areas. Around Immokalee, some snap beans, sweet corn and watermelons were at 100 percent loss with only a minimal amount of squash salvaged. In Manatee County, some fruit from tomato vines and plants looked wind-whipped but were expected to recover. Growers continued to plant cabbage in St. Johns County. Producers marketed light supplies of snap beans, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, peppers, squash, tomatoes and watermelons.

Dry weather during the first week of **November** around Immokalee and Homestead helped drain fields saturated by Wilma's rains. However, there were significant delays in the production of all vegetables for most southern Peninsula areas. The following crops and areas suffered heavy damages and losses: okra, sweet corn, snap beans and tomatoes in Miami-Dade County; most bean fields south of Lake Okeechobee; almost all sweet corn around Lake Okeechobee; and peppers, watermelons and tomatoes in the Immokalee area. Producers in areas affected by Wilma continued salvaging older plants and replanting lost acreage with some activity hindered by a lack of labor. Very light amounts of sweet corn, snap beans, watermelons, cucumbers, peppers, squash and eggplant were available from other central and northern areas with modest amounts of tomatoes harvested around Quincy and in other central Peninsula production regions. Producers harvested vegetables while trying to meet the Thanksgiving Day demand. Drier weather in the central and southern Peninsula allowed fieldwork to progress at a normal pace and allowed some saturated fields in the southern Peninsula to drain. Okra harvesting slowed due to extensive storm damage around the Miami-Dade County area, but started back up with very light amounts available by the latter part of November.

Towards the end of November harvesting gained momentum over the central and southern Peninsula with the volume of cucumbers, peppers and tomatoes increasing. Tomato picking in the Quincy area was nearly complete with a reduced volume as temperatures plunged to near freezing, while tomato harvesting in the central and southern Peninsula areas increased seasonally. A very light volume of sweet corn was also picked in northern and central Peninsula localities. Strawberry growers around Plant City and Dover welcomed cooler temperatures, which enhanced berry development. Blueberry harvesting got underway.

December started with showers in the Immokalee and Palmetto-Ruskin areas slowing some planting and harvesting, but dry and clear weather for most areas throughout the rest of December allowed planting and harvesting to proceed at a normal pace with growers shipping crops for the holiday market. The harvesting of endive, escarole, Romaine lettuce, radishes and cabbage started with only very light supplies available. A very light amount of strawberries were also marketed from the Plant City and Dover areas, where strawberry picking slowly gained momentum. Other vegetables available included snap beans, peppers, squash and tomatoes, and very light amounts of sweet corn, eggplant and okra. Significant rains in the Hastings area slowed some cabbage cutting. Also, adverse weather significantly slowed the celery crop around Lake Okeechobee with no significant amount available until late December. Growers paused to observe the holidays while cool temperatures slowed some plant development.

SNAP BEANS: Area for harvest is forecast at 13,200 acres, up 6 percent from last year and 10 percent above 2004. Some acreage south of Lake Okeechobee and in the Miami-Dade County area was replanted after damage from Hurricane Wilma. Mostly mild conditions since the hurricane have aided crop growth.

CABBAGE: Producers hope to cut 5,500 acres, up 500 acres or 10 percent from last year. Hurricane Wilma slowed planting of the winter crop around Hastings with only minor damage from the storm's wind and rain. Some southern Peninsula acreage was damaged by the hurricane. Harvesting in other central and southern Peninsula areas started by the first of December with producers marketing very light amounts.

SWEET CORN: Harvested area is forecast at 7,200 acres, 8 percent less than last year and 14 percent below 2004. Hurricane Wilma caused major damage and losses to sweet corn acreage in the Miami-Dade County area in late October. A few growers righted stalks blown over by Wilma's strong winds in the days following the storm. Mostly mild conditions since the storm aided replanting and crop growth. Harvesting began by early October with small amounts available during November and December.

BELL PEPPERS: Winter acreage is forecast at 6,200 acres, 2 percent below last year but 2 percent above 2004. Bell peppers grown in the southern Peninsula suffered significant damage from Hurricane Wilma in October. Dry weather around Jupiter, Stuart, Immokalee, and Homestead during November helped drain fields saturated by Wilma's rain. Dry weather continued into December which allowed planting and harvesting to progress on schedule.

STRAWBERRIES: Area harvested is forecast at 7,400 acres, up 100 acres or 1 percent from last year. Preparation for the winter crop began at the end of September as growers laid plastic and started transplanting. The strawberry crop received no damage from Hurricane Wilma at the end of October, at which time 90 percent of the winter crop had been transplanted. Cool temperatures during November and December boosted berry development but slowed plant growth. Picking began by Thanksgiving.

TOMATOES: Winter tomato acreage is forecast at 11,000 acres, down 12 percent from 2005 and 15 percent below 2004. Hurricane Wilma caused major damage and losses to the tomato crop in the areas of Immokalee, Jupiter, Stuart, Palmetto-Ruskin, and Miami-Dade during late October. Mostly mild conditions in November and December aided replanting and crop growth with acreage planted after the storm reported in good condition. Growers in the Quincy area extended harvest by almost two months to help close the gap in supplies from the central and southern Peninsula. Producers started picking acreage hurt by Wilma in early January.

UNITED STATES

The prospective area for harvest of 11 selected fresh market vegetables during the winter quarter is forecast at 183,900 acres. This is 2 percent above 2005 and 3 percent greater than 2004. Acreage increases for carrots, cauliflower, cabbage, snap beans, spinach, and broccoli more than offset decreases for tomatoes, sweet corn, celery, bell pepper, and head lettuce. Strawberry area planted for major States (California, Florida, and Oregon) in 2006 is forecast at 46,300 acres, up 4 percent for the same States in 2005 and 6 percent above the same States in 2004.

CABBAGE: Winter acreage for harvest is forecast at 13,900 acres, 10 percent above 2005 and up 11 percent from 2004. The Texas crop did well early in the season under perfect growing conditions. Some irrigation was needed as the weather became cool and dry during crop development. The last week of December brought hot weather which the crop did not tolerate well.

CELERY: The winter celery crop for harvest in California is forecast at 7,200 acres, down 5 percent from last year and 6 percent below the year before. In Oxnard, the winter celery crop is in good condition. Minimal flooding and damage from the recent rainfall was reported.

HEAD LETTUCE: Area for harvest is forecast at 63,000 acres, down 2 percent from last year but 2 percent above the year before. In Arizona, harvest began two weeks earlier than normal in November because of above average temperatures during the growing season. Quality was good during November. In December, crews had to wait up to six hours on some days to harvest because of ice on the lettuce. This caused variable quality during December. The California desert lettuce crop is doing well this season. Harvest began earlier than usual. Temperatures began to drop the first week of December, which slowed development and delayed harvest, creating a small supply gap that caused higher lettuce prices.

SELECTED FRESH MARKET VEGETABLES AND STRAWBERRIES: Area for Harvest by Crop, State, and Total, Winter Season, 2004-2005 and Forecasted Area 2006

Selected crops and States	Usual harvest period	Winter acreage			2006 area for harvest as percent of 2005
		Harvested		For harvest 2006	
		2004	2005		
		Acres			Percent
SNAP BEANS:					
Florida	Jan-Mar	12,000	12,500	13,200	106
CABBAGE:					
Florida	Jan-Mar	5,300	5,000	5,500	110
Texas	Dec-Mar	7,200	7,600	8,400	111
Total		12,500	12,600	13,900	110
SWEET CORN:					
Florida	Jan-Mar	8,400	7,800	7,200	92
BELL PEPPER: ^{1/}					
Florida	Jan-Mar	6,100	6,300	6,200	98
TOMATOES:					
Florida	Jan-Mar	13,000	12,500	11,000	88
CARROTS:					
California	Jan-Mar	20,000	18,000	22,000	123
Texas	Dec-Mar	1,100	1,500	1,500	100
Total		21,100	19,500	23,500	121
HEAD LETTUCE:					
Arizona--Western	Nov-Apr	46,500	45,600	45,000	99
California	Jan-Mar	15,000	19,000	18,000	95
Total		61,500	64,600	63,000	98
BROCCOLI: ^{1/}					
California	Jan-Mar	26,500	26,500	27,500	104
CAULIFLOWER: ^{1/}					
California	Jan-Mar	7,500	7,600	9,000	119
CELERY: ^{1/}					
California	Jan-Mar	7,700	7,600	7,200	95
SPINACH:					
Texas	Dec-Mar	2,000	2,100	2,200	105
TOTAL OF CROPS LISTED					
Florida		44,800	44,100	43,100	98
United States		138,300	139,600	183,900	132
STRAWBERRIES: ^{1/}					
Florida	Dec-May	7,100	7,300	7,400	101

^{1/} Includes fresh market and processing.